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ABSTRACT

This document provides brief descriptions of 12 prevention strategies, 6 curriculum-based strategies, and 7 motivational strategies for improving student behavior. Alternative schools and programs, counseling, parent involvement, community involvement, student orientation programs, learning styles, writing activities, student codes of conduct, sanctions, behavior contracts, and cooperative learning are among the topics mentioned. Effective programs from seven high schools and districts across the nation are cited. (CLA)

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THE PRACTITIONER

nassp

A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

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Improving Student Behavior

The extent to which schools manage student behavior has been consistently viewed by the general public as a measure of school effectiveness.

Some student behavior derives from experiences outside the school's control, such as the influence of the media, changes in the quality and stability of family life, conditions prevalent in the community, and emphasis on instant gratification.

At times, student misbehavior results from student apathy and disinterest, a sense of alienation and powerlessness, unclear rules on attendance and discipline, and low self-esteem. These are often translated visibly into vandalism, disrespect for people, lack of school spirit, poor achievement, and general rebellion.

Nevertheless, schools can improve student behavior by rooting out the causes of discipline problems. The current literature on student intervention suggests three types of strategies for improving student behavior: prevention strategies, curriculum-based strategies, and motivational strategies. What follows is a laundry list of proven techniques grouped under these three categories.

Prevention Strategies

The first category of improvement strategies attempts to create an environment and/or conditions that inhibit the development of negative student behavior. These strategies aim to prevent undesirable actions or situations from developing by positive planning rather than simply reacting to deviant behavior. Prevention strategies attack problems long before they arise, through intensive organization and planning. Some strategies are extensive while others are more limited. The scope of the strategy reflects the nature and complexity of the problem to be resolved.

1. Alternative schools fall into the extensive category. They provide a totally different setting for students experiencing difficulty in the regular school environment. Typically such schools incorporate flexible scheduling, smaller student-teacher ratios, individualized curricula, group and individual counseling, and work experience. An important goal of alternative schools is to prepare students whenever possible to return to a mainstream school.

2. Alternative programs operate within the regular school setting. Typically, these programs withdraw students with adjustment problems from the general school population and provide environments that are flexible and adapted to individual student needs. Often, the programs are part of a school district's efforts to meet the needs of potential dropouts. In some cases, they replace suspension or expulsion.

Gene J. Watson, Superintendent **500 Dusy St.**
Dothan City Schools **Dothan, Ala. 36301**

After an extensive assessment of all schools in the Dothan City School System in 1987, the board of education and its administration identified the need for a program to eliminate school dropouts. Long-term and short-term programs were adopted.

The long-term program was already operating as part of a larger effort to achieve consistency and fairness in student discipline. The long-term alternative

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involves student assignment for a minimum of six weeks and until released. The program provides an alternative to suspension and expulsion, a continuation of learning opportunities, and intense counseling and rehabilitative services. Students are assigned only after an administrative hearing and a committee recommendation approved by the superintendent of schools.

The short-term program is an in-school suspension alternative. The student is removed from classroom activities for a reasonable and specified period of time, in compliance with the Code of Conduct.

3. Peer counseling has students counseling students and using their influence in constructive ways to effect positive changes in student behavior.

4. Social counseling is a form of school and agency interaction in which social workers and others facilitate parent involvement in the school to help high-risk students.

5. Community involvement can be a source of supportive efforts, such as the Adopt-a-School Program or Partnerships in Education, to increase the range and number of student services.

6. Parent involvement is perhaps the most important prevention strategy. It can be increased by schools providing information and opportunities for parents to become more active in the school. Such activities can include volunteer programs, orientation meetings, parent membership on school advisory committees, organizations such as PTO/PTAs, and parent newsletters.

7. Intensive services simultaneously provide several measures to facilitate student behavior changes. Once a problem has been identified, a plan is developed that incorporates multiple initiatives. The strength of this approach lies in its integration of several strategies.

Donald Grossnickle, Asst. Principal and Director of Instruction
213 N. Lombard Rd. Addison, Ill., 60101 Addison Trail High School

A three-part dropout prevention program is available to students of Addison Trail High School. The first component is a module of time (MOD)/reading program in which all freshman students are required to participate in lieu of a study period. Topics covered in the MOD program include how to study, reasons for staying in school, the importance of grades, motivation and self-esteem, dealing with peer pressure, choices among cocurricular activities, behavior guidelines, guidance services, and drug awareness.

The second component involves a pupil personnel committee composed of a psychologist, social worker, assistant principal, guidance director, dean, and special education department chair. This committee reviews referrals from teachers, deans, counselors, and parents and recommends individualized programs for students who have been identified as potential dropouts.

The third component is intended for students who are unable to function successfully even when provided with the above services. These students have the option of attending Ombudsman Educational Services, a for-profit alternative school for those at-risk students who are most likely to drop out of traditional high schools. Students receive credit through learning contracts mutually developed by Ombudsman and the Addison Trail staff. Elements contributing to the success of the Ombudsman program are voluntary enrollment, positive reinforcement and immediate feedback through computer-assisted instruction, individual attention, small class size, and a simple but highly structured environment.

8. Attendance monitoring is a powerful tool to ensure regular attendance. Clearly defined attendance policies are prerequisites to reduced absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness. Daily activities include telephone calls to parents about student absences, home visits when appropriate, and referral to attendance officers.

9. Work-study experiences are cooperative programs linking schools with jobs to increase the relevance of the skills being learned. These programs allow students to evaluate first-hand the benefits of certain occupations while gaining skills that can be used in future employment.

10. Referrals to community agencies ensure that students receive needed services that the school cannot provide. Various local agencies complement and reinforce educational efforts.

11. Inservice training aims to improve and sharpen staff expertise and/or awareness about successful techniques. Such training also seeks to improve communication and motivation among staff members and

to support a positive school climate.

12. Student orientation programs focus on school expectations and/or school policies. The major purpose of orientation is to provide information about the everyday functioning of the school. These programs traditionally have consisted of lectures and review of handbooks, but some innovative programs include a forum for student dialog and the use of videos.

Donald J. Wilson, Discipline Coordinator Spring Valley High School
Sparkleberry Lane Columbia, S. C. 29223

Spring Valley determined that an unusually large number of its special education students had been suspended and that this group constituted more than 85 percent of all students suspended. To correct the problem, the discipline coordinator created a series of discipline videos to illustrate the rules in the student handbook. The suspension rate among special education students decreased by more than 50 percent.

The videos are now being used with a wider population in selected classroom situations. Teachers have been encouraged to use one or more of the tapes with problem classes. The result has been improved student behavior.

The video series consists of five tapes: 1) Introduction, 2) Disruptive Behavior, 3) Disrespect, 4) Tardies to Class, and 5) Cheating. The tapes include real classroom situations presented by students after a brief rehearsal (no script). The result is a spontaneous, true-to-life presentation.

Curriculum-Based Strategies

The curriculum itself offers opportunities to improve student behavior and to meet student needs. Curriculum content can be varied to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students and to increase the likelihood of success and positive morale. The curriculum may include such focused content areas as law-related education, substance abuse prevention information, and citizenship training. Delivery may emphasize such methods as student cooperative learning rather than teacher-centered teaching techniques.

1. Innovative curriculum results from modifying existing district/school curriculum to help a student population whose needs cannot be met within the established program. The specific components of an innovative program are determined by the target population. Typical populations are underachieving students, students lacking in socialization skills, those with low self-esteem, students involved in substance abuse, at-risk students, and those in trouble with the law.

Jim Solomon, English Teacher and ASK Coordinator William H. Hall High School
975 North Main St. West Hartford, Conn. 06117

The ASK (Alternative Search for Knowledge) program has existed at William H. Hall for 14 years. Its primary objective is to help underachievers improve their academic performance. A team-taught English and social studies curriculum is offered together with supportive, informal counseling to students in grades 10-12 who have been identified as bright but underachieving. The range of problems can extend from relatively minor academic difficulties to serious "at-risk" symptoms. The ASK Program aims to rekindle an interest in learning and to raise students' confidence to pursue further educational opportunities.

2. Cooperative learning shows promise as a technique for improving student on-task behavior. Experiencing success as a member of a heterogeneous group may contribute to student self-esteem as well as improved student relationships. Enhanced self-confidence, problem-solving skills development, greater student responsibility, and desirable student attitudes are other benefits of this strategy.

3. Adapting the curriculum to incorporate various learning styles and flexible teaching styles can be effective in reducing or limiting negative behavior. Students' interests can be captured and maintained by using differing modalities in all lessons and programs. Even more important is diagnosing student cognitive skill strengths and weaknesses and providing appropriate remedial (augmentation) training. (The NASSP Learning Style Profile and *LSP Handbooks* can support all these initiatives.)

4. Writing activities can sometimes help close the gap between teacher expectations and student apathy in a particularly difficult and unruly class. The opportuni-

ty to share one's thoughts and the subsequent exchange/interaction between teacher and students can establish positive communication and foster mutual understanding.

5. Homework can enhance student motivation, initiative, independence, and responsibility. Of particular importance are the frequency, quality, and relevance of the work assigned. Working independently at home involves following directions, making judgments, posing additional questions for study, and developing individual initiative and responsibility.

6. Classroom management strategies can influence student behavior. Improved student behavior can result from appropriate class pacing, starting and ending class on time, teaching content at the students' level of understanding, addressing the whole class as appropriate rather than single students, using humor, and giving students assignments that allow choices.

Motivational Strategies

In contrast to the prevention and curriculum-based plans of action, motivational strategies focus on the existing behaviors of learners. The ultimate objective of motivational strategies is to foster the intrinsic motivation that results from successfully completing an activity or task. Some plans focus on positive reinforcement practices to increase or maintain desired behaviors. Other strategies seek to change student behaviors by using rules and punishments.

Positive Reinforcement Practices

1. Student involvement in rule setting can improve behavior through shared decision making. By allowing students to participate in making rules, schools teach them that they have ownership and should live by the rules developed. As a by-product, teachers who have fostered collaborative rule setting often gain insights into student frustrations and concerns.

2. Fostering self-discipline (versus external coercion) addresses aspects of locus of control. Through values education, students learn to understand their behavior. By accepting responsibility for their own actions, they promote their own intellectual and affective growth.

3. Allowing choices fosters individual self-determination and the opportunity for active involvement. A sense of responsibility results from the opportunity to choose. The more students are involved in their school, the likelier they are to display positive behavior.

4. Student-mediated resolution of disputes allows students to refine problem-solving abilities and communication skills while using a uniquely effective technique to reduce behavior problems. Peers help peers who are experiencing problems in school find relevance and understanding. (Recall the best of the "student courts" from an earlier era.)

5. Praise and rewards can enhance student behavior when used to reinforce desirable behavior. The sooner reinforcement follows an action, the more effective it will be in ensuring that this behavior will be repeated. (Avoid artificial and perfunctory words and rewards that can become counter-productive and harmful.)

Rules and Punishments

1. Student Discipline Codes are written policies that delineate student responsibilities, student rights, and the consequences for transgressions. Codes usually cover such responsibilities as dressing appropriately, complying with school regulations, attending class regularly and punctually, showing respect for public and private property, and respecting the rights of others. Student rights include protection from acts of violence, recourse to due process, freedom from discrimination, equal protection, and the right to know what is expected. Written policies are important to convey a sense of fairness to students, parents, and teachers.

Sharon Rohrke,
Asst. Superintendent
Administrative & Pupil Services
Modesto Public Schools
426 Locust St.
Modesto, Calif. 95351

The Modesto Board of Education has adopted two student conduct codes: one for grades K-6, and one for grades 7-12. The Student Codes clearly define expectations and consequences for behavior, attendance, classroom citizenship, and cocurricular activities. The codes also provide for alternative programs, strategies, and interventions to meet the special needs of students exhibiting truancy, excessive absences, or behavior problems that prevent them or other students from learning.

The documents outline the general rights and

responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, and administrators as well as the specific rights of appeal and due process afforded parents and students.

School activity program eligibility, including participation in senior activities and the graduation ceremony, is clearly defined in the following areas: academic, attendance, substance abuse, behavior, classroom citizenship, and debts owed for loss or damage to school property.

The conduct codes are reviewed annually to determine any need of updating; e.g., to incorporate changes in state law or community developments that could affect the safety of campuses. During this past year, for example, new sections of the code were added to prohibit dress that advertises or promotes the use of alcohol, tobacco products, or controlled substances, and clothing or symbols that denote membership in a gang or any group that advocates drug use or disruptive behavior.

The district believes that the fourth R is responsibility. Conduct codes and a formal partnership with law enforcement agencies provide the foundation for programs and strategies to keep campuses safe for students and staff members.

2. Student handbooks disseminate general school information and information about expectations for student behavior. Typically, the contents include: student conduct, rules of attendance, guidance services, library and media services, bell schedules, school organizations, homework and make-up policies, use of lockers, and similar information about the daily operation of the school.

3. Sanctions are applied in response to unacceptable student behavior. They include detention, in-school suspension, traditional suspension, and expulsion. In some states corporal punishment is still used.

In recent years alternative ways of responding to student misbehavior have produced innovative practices such as behavior contracts, comprehensive social contracts, and Saturday work sessions.

4. Behavior contracts involve agreements between a student and a teacher or administrator. The goal is to ensure that the student understands what the desired behavior is, the actions the student promises to take, and the consequences that will follow failure to comply with the contract. Behavior contracts guarantee in writing that all parties understand the problem, an acceptable plan of action, and the consequences.

5. Comprehensive social contracts are expanded agreements that involve parents, school personnel, and community agencies, as well as the student. An attempt is made to establish joint ownership of the problem and to define each person's expected role in resolving it. Generally, consequences for actions rather than punishments are developed. This strategy tries to maximize the use of all resources.

6. Interest in Saturday work sessions is reviving. A powerful deterrent to student misbehavior is an extended school week. This activity usually precedes more serious sanctions (e.g., out-of-school suspensions), thus preventing absences from class.

John Handfield, Asst. Principal **Marsh Rd.**
Pelham High School **Pelham, N.H. 03076**

The student discipline code at Pelham High School deals with two categories of inappropriate behavior. Category I offenses (e.g., fighting, vulgarity, smoking on school grounds) result in out-of-school suspension. Category II offenses (e.g., skipping class, tardiness to class, insolence, and insubordination) result in assigned demerits. Until the 1988-1989 school year, students who accumulated more than four demerits were assigned in-school suspension at the rate of one day per demerit in excess of four. Beginning in September 1988, a Saturday Education program replaced in-school suspension.

Saturday Education is held in the school library and extends from 8:00 a.m. to noon. Students are required to bring schoolwork. For those who do not, the supervisor gives a series of questions related to the offenses for which they were assigned. No radios, televisions, tape players, etc., are permitted. Failure to attend Saturday Education results in out-of-school suspension at the rate of one day for each Saturday missed. Parents are responsible for providing transportation to and from Saturday Education.

Since program inception, the number of Category II offenders has declined dramatically. Students indicate that the primary reason for the decline is the existence of this program.

7. The disciplinary process used to enforce school regulations has changed to ensure that students are dealt with fairly. One school's concern about keeping stu-

dents in class has resulted in a progression of sanctions for class cutting and a streamlined procedure for seeing students about discipline infractions.

Réal Boivin & James Hammond **S. Porter St.**
Assistant Principals **Manchester, N.Y. 03103**
Manchester Memorial High School

With a population of 1,600 students, Manchester Memorial High School has been successful in reducing student cutting of classes by two-thirds. This improvement has resulted from a revised progression of sanctions and a streamlined administrative response process.

The cost/demand model in the field of economics predicts that the demand (in this case, undesirable cutting) will decrease in proportion to the increased cost (namely, sanctions). Progressively greater sanctions for class cutting were instituted: three days of detention for the first offense; one day of internal suspension for a second cut; three days of internal suspension for a third offense; external suspension for any subsequent cuts.

The administrative response to offenses was modified in conjunction with these sanctions. Instead of students reporting to the assistant principal's office, the administrators go to the classrooms. Students are called into the hallway where the offense is reviewed. The main benefit is high visibility; all students realize that offenders are taken to task and teachers see action that supports a positive learning environment. Administrative response is clearly evident and very little time is missed from class.

In support of the program, counselors talk with students assigned to in-school suspension for offenses. (A more detailed description of this approach is found in the NASSP Bulletin, January 1988.)

A Final Note

Each strategy described above, when used individually, can improve student behavior, but the greatest impact is achieved when many strategies are applied concurrently.

This *Practitioner* was prepared by James R. Hammond and Réal G. Boivin, assistant principals at Manchester Memorial High School, Manchester, N. H.

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